CRASH
MICRO ACTION
A FUSION RETRO PUBLICATION
THE SPECTRUM
THE BEST SPECTRUM MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD...
REVIEWS OF THE HOBBIT & MANIC MINER PLUS A LOOK AT THE BEST CRASH SMASHES WHICH ARE INCLUDED ON THE SPECTRUM.
SPECIAL CRASH MAGAZINE TO BE INCLUDED WITH THE SPECTRUM - HAPPY PLAYING!
THE SPECTRUM
CLASSIC REVIEWS
Retro Games Ltd
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FEATURES & REGULARS

4 Editorial
A special editorial from Retro Games Ltd's Darren Melbourne.

5 News
A roundup of of the numerous Fusion retro projects, which cover magazines, events and now the games themselves.

7 The Secret Spectrum
Chris Smith introduces his book, The Secret ZX Spectrum, which examines the Spectrum's ULA.

10 The CRASH Smashes
Graeme Mason looks at some of the Smashes avaialble on your brand new Spectrum.

16 The Modern Spectrum Scene
We take a brief look at the the current state of the Spectrum scene and highlight six games from the major regions still developing Spectrum games.

***22* Spectrum Memories**
The Retro Gaming Ltd. team and friends, share their memories of playing on the original Spectrum.

26 The Legacy Of Knight Lore
Graeme Mason explores the legacy of the seminal game.

REVIEWS

8 Manic Miner
The zany world of Matthew Smith's mind materialised into one of the most iconic 8-bit games of all time. With 20 meticulously crafted levels, *Manic Miner* became the must-have game of 1983.

18 The Hobbit
"You are in a comfortable tunnel like hall. To the east is the round green door". And so it began - the one text adventure to rule them all.

20 Trashman
Relive those pre-wheelie bin days as middle England's most popular refuse collector.

24 Penetrator
Melbourne House's fantastic (and licenceless) adaption of *Scramble* takes the player into subterranean depths. For a game that arrived in 1982, it came with explosive visuals and fast and impressive scrolling.

With thanks to RGL's Dylan Smith, Jen Carling, Sophie Walker, Flinn Fraher, Harvey Badcock, and Plaion's Simon Turner and Ben Jones

FUSION RETRO BOOKS

CRASH

MICRO GAMES ACTION

Little did the fifteen-year-old me dare to dream that one day I would be fortunate enough to guest-edit an issue of Crash magazine. Inexplicably, forty years later, both Crash magazine and I are still here. Crash is still as lively, exciting, and vibrant as it ever was. It's fair to say that, sadly, the same can't be said of me.

Before writing this editorial, I decided to reacquaint myself with the very first issue of Crash from February 1984. I expected an inevitable wave of nostalgia, which duly arrived on page one. What I didn't expect was the sheer page-turning excitement as I rediscovered the incredible games and editorial content of yesteryear.

Of course, I remembered titles such as 3D Deathchase, Ant Attack, Bugaboo the Flea, and Lunar Jetman, but I had completely forgotten titles such as Valhalla and Maziaks and their publishers, Legend and DK Tronics. I felt an overwhelming urge to do as instructed in the adverts and take my pocket money to Laskey's, Woolworths, or Boots and immediately play the promised megagames.

I'm sure that when Crash was conceived, the brothers Oliver and Franco Frey and their friend Roger Kean didn't anticipate or appreciate the cultural significance of what they were creating. Crash became our bible, our monthly source of information and entertainment. It was a magazine that was only for lovers of the mighty Spectrum, and it validated our love for the machine.

Thank you to Roger, Oliver, and Franco for the memories and to Chris for keeping them alive.

- Darren Melbourne

NEWS & EDITORIAL

FUSION MAGAZINES

If you enjoy this mini version of CRASH Magazine, then there's plenty more where that came from! Retro Fusion Books now publishes bi-monthly versions of CRASH along with ZZAP! 64, ZZAP! Amiga, Sega Force, and our latest publication, NEXT. Each magazine features a mix of news, reviews, previews, features, and nostalgia trips for their respective platform. Our magazines are written by industry veterans and new talent alike and produced to the standard you would expect from any magazine you could buy on the high street. To find out more and subscribe, you can visit: fusionretrobooks.com

FUSION EVENTS

For three years running now, Fusion Retro Events has hosted separate CRASH and Zzap! Live events. These full-day showcases, hosted in Kenilworth, provide retro fans with rooms packed with classic games machines and high profile guest speakers from the retro world: fusionretroevents.co.uk

FUSION GAMES

Launched just this year, Fusion Retro Games aims to be your one-stop shop for physical NEXT releases. We stock games from all the major publishers, including many exclusive special edition box sets. If you own a Spectrum NEXT, this is the place to satisfy your gaming needs. fusionretrogames.com

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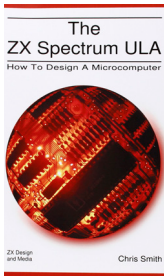
THE SECRET ZX SPECTRUM

Chris Smith, RGL's CTO and head of "getting it to work"

From an early age I've had a drive to understand how things work, in particular science and electronics, so when home computers became accessible in the early 1980s, it was inevitable that I would find them fascinating. I quickly developed an ambition to build my own computer, but struggled to understand how to generate a TV picture. My goal lay unrealised until 2007 when I came across my circuit designs from the 1980s, which reinvigorated my ambition. So I decided to design a ZX Spectrum clone: a challenge, because most of the ZX Spectrum design is hidden in an undocumented custom chip, the ULA.

I blogged the entire reverse engineering and design process, and succeeded in creating The Harlequin, the first 100% compatible ZX Spectrum clone, discovering many of the ULAs secrets in the process, but not all.

To answer these unresolved questions, I set about physically reverse engineering the ULA by having the silicon chip professionally photographed under a microscope, from which I traced out and analysed the entire circuit. This was a huge undertaking and resulted in me writing the definitive book, "The ZX Spectrum ULA - How to design a microcomputer". In the process, I became acquainted with the original hardware designer Richard Altwasser, who furnished the book with many amazing anecdotes from his time at Sinclair Research and the design of the ZX Spectrum.

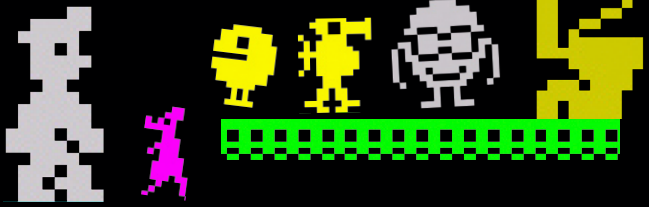


I feel fortunate to have solved the ULA mysteries, enabling the creation of new projects such as the Uno, Omni, and the NEXT, and the help it has given to the ZX Spectrum community, of which I am part.

MANIC MINER

Bug Byte

Matthew Smith | £5.95 • 1983 • 48K



Mining was all the rage back in the eighties, and so it was that a game based on said activity became insanely popular. Its popularity was not entirely based on its subject matter, though, but more so on the brilliance of the game. Taking on the role of Willy, you have to guide him through a total of 20 caverns as he endeavours to collect all the shiny things from each room and escape before his air runs out. Sadly, there are no shiny oxygen tanks down there, so don't expect any of that type of assistance as you go, just an expectation of being able to avoid everything that moves (as well as things that don't move) and high falls so that things don't come to a sticky (and painful) end. Willy will face a plethora of bizarre and strange creatures along the way, as well as cute-but-deadly penguins, but there's no time to get the bird feed out - you've got shiny things to collect! Now, get down there Willy (snigger), and get the job done!

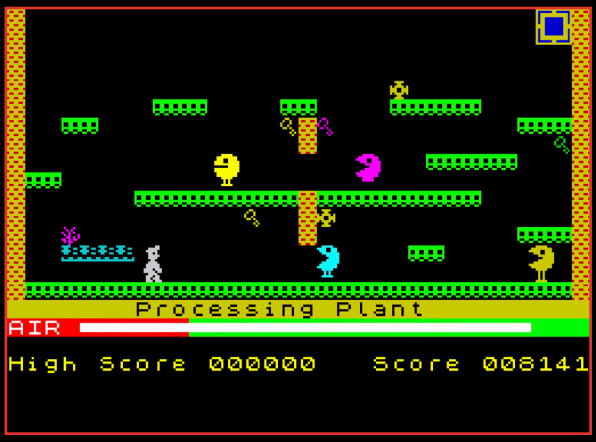
Criticism

Ah, that beautiful-though-ear-piercing music. That menu screen is a classic in many ways - I like to reminisce about the piano keys flashing away and the illustration of Willy's house at the top of the screen, the sun on the horizon (and let's not forget his 'interesting' looking car), but that racket coming out of the beeper's speaker is more famous. For the wrong reasons, but famous nonetheless. Without getting too cliché, it is part of the game's (and Speccy's) charm, and I have to admit I am fond of it, but my god, it is horrendous. In a beautiful way, of course.

Away from the title screen, and you're straight into the famous and familiar first screen - Central Cavern. Some people find it easy, others don't, though it will depend on how well-versed you are to the type of level it is. There's only one 'nasty', so to speak, so how hard can it be? Very. It can be very hard, is the answer. The conveyor belt, the deadly bushes, the even deadlier stalactites, and the crumbling platforms are more than enough to put you off your stride. As with the majority of the levels, timing is essential here, with one mistimed run or jump leading to death and a lost life.

Gordon's Take

Manic Miner is the finest platform game I've ever played, and I've played many. It contains 20 brilliantly designed levels, and each one is memorable (yes, even the bloody Solar Power Generator). It's no surprise it tops the lists of Spectrum players' fondest memories - Matthew Smith knew what he was doing and created a game that hundreds of others still try to replicate, even to this day. One of the best design features of the game is that it's all mapped on a grid, so the player gets to know exactly how far their jumping arc will allow them. This is a game I can loop - I'm not saying it's easy, but because it is so good, I learned to hone my platforming craft on it. *Manic Miner* is legendary.



Level design is everything in *Manic Miner*, with each one having its touch of genius (and peculiarities). If it's not the large yellow monster in *Central Cavern*, it's the glasses-wearing Eugene in *Eugene's Lair*. If it's not mutant telephones, it's kangaroos. If it's not an alien Kong beast, it's the falling satellites in *Skylab Landing Bay*. Humour is rife throughout, too, with the aforementioned Eugene, who was based on Eugene Evans of Imagine Software (I'm sure he was fine with this), and the level *The Bank*, complete with its bouncing cheques. On top of the design, animation is also of the highest quality; you won't see much better than the shoulder-shuffling mutant telephones, the flapping toilet lids, the blinking floating eyes, the bounce of the kangaroos, the ball-balancing seals - it's a dream of a game to look at. All of this, together with the brightness of the beautiful Spectrum colour palette, varying levels of difficulty, and overall addictiveness, make *Manic Miner* a true treasure of the Speccy library.

- Paul Davies

Comments

This Spectrum classic still holds up after all these years. It's lost none of its charm, playability, and addictiveness. You'll be remembering all the tricks and timings needed to get past each level for many more years to come, which just shows how it's managed to instil itself into many a gamer's head forever. I'm still in love.

Keyboard: Top row - left and right, bottom row Jump

Use of Computer:	**90%**
Graphics:	**90%**
Playability:	**94%**
Getting started:	**87%**
Addictive Qualities:	**94%**
Overall:	**95%**

The Crash Smashes

THE SPECTRUM

contains dozens of brilliant ZX Spectrum games, but which are the best of the best, those hallowed, brilliant games awarded the ultimate

THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

Year: 1984
Author: Mike Singleton
Publisher: Beyond
Crash Score: 10/10
Issue Reviewed: 7 – Aug 1984

Mike Singleton's breathtaking strategy-cum-adventure game may not be the most accessible title on this list, yet it offers unprecedented depth and gameplay if you're willing to invest the time in its elaborate story. Set in a *Lord Of The Rings*-style world, your task as Luxor The Moonprince is to vanquish the evil Doomdark, but first, you must assemble an army to take on the evil Witchking. With its glorious snowscapes and innovative gameplay, *The Lords Of Midnight* is one of the most evocative and engaging ZX Spectrum games.

Now explore the epic world of
THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT
by
Mike Singleton
© Beyond Software
LUXOR THE MOONPRINCE
He stands at the Tower of the Moon, looking Southeast to the Downs of Shadows.

AVALON

Year: 1984
Author: Steve Turner
Publisher: Hewson Consultants
Crash Score: 91%
Issue Reviewed: 10 – Nov 1984

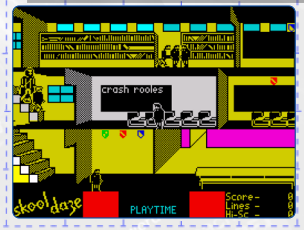
Three months after *The Lords Of Midnight*, Spectrum owners were treated to another fantasy epic in the form of Steve Turner's *Avalon*. It's another find-and-eliminate mission, this time as Maroc The Wizard, out to destroy The Lord Of Chaos and save the land. Full of ingenious gameplay – the enemies follow you from room to room! – *Avalon's* stage-like presentation and complex gameplay were unprecedented for 1984, securing author Steve Turner another Crash Smash.

of accolades – a Crash Smash? Graeme Mason has a dip through this fabulous roster of games to discover the biggest and brightest Crash Smashes on your brand new Spectrum gaming device.

SKOOL DAZE

Year: 1984
Author: Dave Reidy, Keith Warrington
Publisher: Microsphere
Crash Score: 93%
Issue Reviewed: 11 – Dec 1984

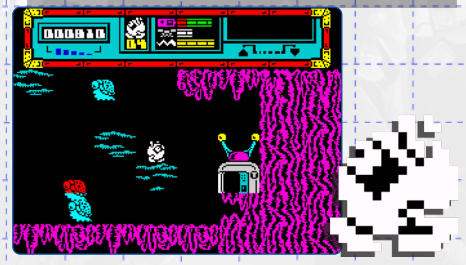
The mad Christmas rush of 1984 brought several excellent Spectrum games to market, and this standout title has become a legend of the scene. Taking place over a term at a busy suburban school, the player is naughty scamp, Eric, out to retrieve his school report from the headmaster's safe before its damning comments reach his parents. Full of wonderfully eccentric characters within a unique sandbox environment, the ability to rename all the characters was an inspired move by its creators.



STARQUAKE

Year: 1985
Author: Stephen Crow
Publisher: Bubble Bus
Crash Score: 95%
Issue Reviewed: 22 – Nov 1985

We spin forward to Autumn 1985 for our next game, Steve Crow's manic *Starquake*. Starring the comical BLOB (BioLogically Operated Being), this fast-paced arcade adventure scored a massive 95% in issue 22 of Crash. BLOB's mission is to save the Earth from a rogue planet by repairing its core, and with hundreds of screens to explore, plus a bunch of aggressive aliens, it's no easy task. Colourful, fun, and boasting some crunching sound effects, *Starquake* remains one of the Spectrum's greatest arcade adventures.



SABOTEUR!

Year: 1985
Author: Clive Townsend
Publisher: Durell
Crash Score: 93%
Issue Reviewed: 24 – Jan 1986

Our Christmas 1985 issue was chock-full of Smashes, and for *James Bond* fans, this was the most exciting of the 90%-plus games. Your mission is to retrieve a computer disk full of the names of rebel leaders. The disk is hidden within a vast warehouse, which the player can explore at their leisure, hampered only by a time limit and various guards and their faithful attack dogs. With its large and impressive sprites and tons of atmosphere, *Saboteur*! instantly cemented itself as a Spectrum classic, fully deserving its Crash Smash.

SPELLBOUND

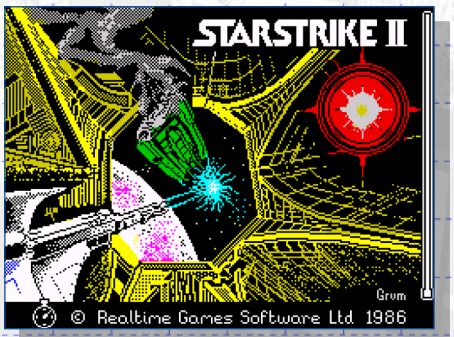
Year: 1985
Author: David Jones
Publisher: Mastertronic (MAD)
Crash Score: 95%
Issue Reviewed: 24 – Jan 1986

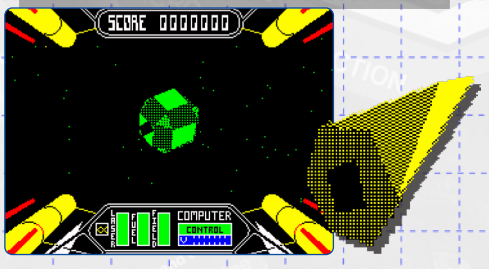
In the same issue, Crash reviewed the first game from Mastertronic's new MAD label, priced at a pound more than its usual fare. A sequel to *Finders Keepers*, *Spellbound* introduces bigger sprites, more challenging puzzles, and the revolutionary 'Windimation' menu system, as its heroine, Magic Knight, attempts to free her mentor, Gimbal The Wizard. Despite the price increase, the Crash reviewers loved *Spellbound*, making it the highest-scoring budget game to date.

STARSTRIKE II

Year: 1986
Author: Graeme Baird, Ian Oliver, Andrew Onions
Publisher: Realtime Games
Crash Score: 96%
Issue Reviewed: 28 – May 1986

The Spectrum is home to many excellent games with wireframe graphics. In 1986, the renowned specialists in the field, Realtime, went one further, producing the holy grail of space shooters: filled-in, shaded objects. The result stunned the Crash reviewers in our May 1986 issue, who awarded it an astonishing 96%. Essentially a shoot-'em-up, albeit a complex and technically amazing one, *Starstrike II* quickly became the benchmark for space shooters.





JACK THE NIPPER

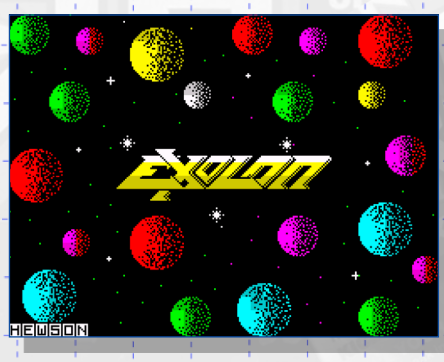
Year: 1986
Author: Greg Holmes, John Holmes
Publisher: Gremlin Graphics
Crash Score: 93%
Issue Reviewed: 30 – Jul 1986

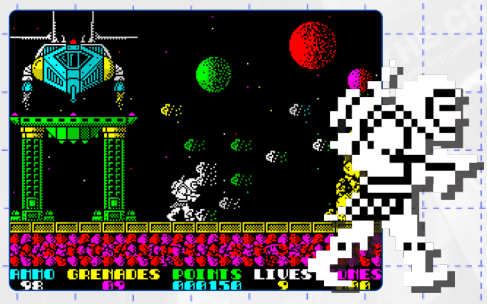
Like *Skool Daze*, Gremlin's *Jack The Nipper* cheerfully pokes fun at a quaint British way of life, following the errant tot Jack as he wreaks havoc throughout his home town. The objective is to get Jack's Naughty-o-meter soaring, preferably without too many spankings, and with its cartoon-like graphics, smooth gameplay, and amusing pranks, *Jack The Nipper* was a deserved Crash Smash in issue 30.

EXOLON

Year: 1987
Author: Raffaele Cecco
Publisher: Hewson
Crash Score: 90%
Issue Reviewed: 43 – Aug 1987

Raffaele Cecco was famous for his colourful space adventures, but the ace programmer also knew how to construct an entertaining game. *Exolon* is the run-and-gun game that engendered a whole range of clones, none of which bettered the supreme playability of their inspiration. Using his hand cannon and pack grenades, the hero, Vitorc, travels across each screen, despatching flying and ground-based enemies while upgrading to the eponymous exoskeleton for extra firepower and protection. *Exolon* is a vibrant action game which rightly received a Crash Smash in the summer of 1987.

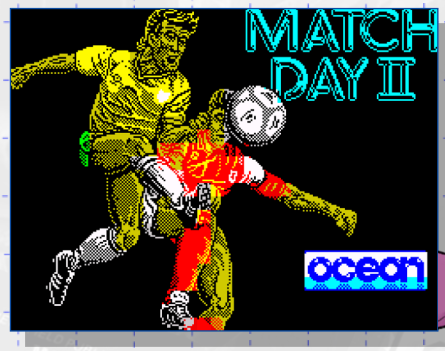




MATCH DAY II

Year: 1987
Author: Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond
Publisher: Ocean
Crash Score: 91%
Issue Reviewed: 48 – Jan 1988

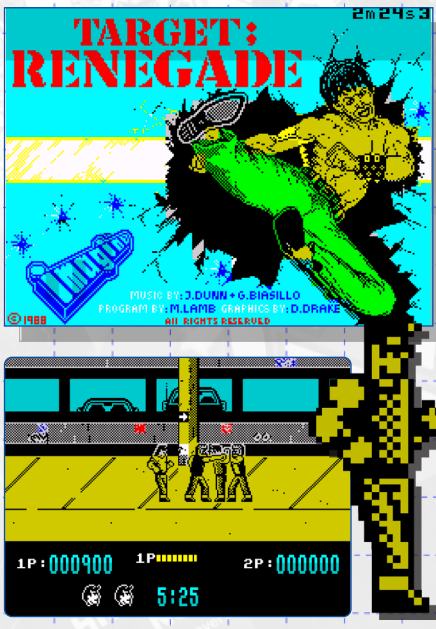
Yes, we know – we should have smashed *Match Day*! The original game scored 86% in issue 13, and the readers never let us forget it, constantly voting the game into the Crash Hotline Chart. However, when Jon Ritman released his follow-up three years later, we did not make the same mistake again, Smashing *Match Day II* in the Christmas 1987 issue. With its updated options – most notably a kickometer that allows three different kick strengths – we considered *Match Day II* a thoroughly professional upgrade and a timely opportunity to right a previous wrong. Sorry, Jon!



TARGET RENEGADE

Year: 1988
Author: Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Simon Butler, Gari Biasillo, Jonathan Dunn
Publisher: Ocean
Crash Score: 90%
Issue Reviewed: 52 – May 1988

In a similar vein to *Match Day*, the original *Renegade*, based on the Taito arcade game, narrowly missed out on a Crash Smash, notching an agonising 89% inside issue 44. Eight months later, its sequel arrived and secured just one percent more – enough to elevate it to Crash Smash status. Naturally, the plot again involves cleaning up the streets of their resident scum. Nevertheless, *Target: Renegade* differed enough to become another hit, especially with its nifty co-op multiplayer mode. It's a shame it would be the last we'd see of the series…



SNAKE ESCAPE

Year: 2016
Author: Einar Saukas, Jarrod Bentley
Publisher: Monument Microgames
Crash Score: 93%
Issue Reviewed: Crash Annual Dec 2018

Puzzle games have remained popular on the ZX Spectrum throughout its lifetime and beyond, and this 2016 game from the dev team of Einar Saukas (programming) and Jarrod Bentley (graphics) impressed the new Fusion Crash enough to award it a Crash Smash in the first Crash Annual six years ago. The aim is to guide the friendly and brightly-coloured snake to the food on each level. Each screen has to be planned carefully, as the snake can only stack vertically so far, and as with all the best puzzlers, the levels soon become real chinstrokers!

THE MODERN SPECTRUM SCENE

It was Alternative Software's Dr. Who: Dalek Attack, which enjoyed the dubious honour of turning the lights off on the Spectrum's commercial software run. Published in 1993, Dalek Attack bookended a remarkable 11 years of commercial software support for Sir. Clives' rubber-keyed wonder, before the 16 bits and console market finally took over.

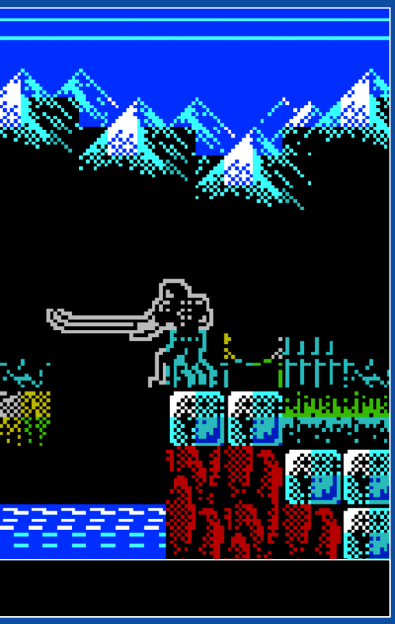
However, as the existence of this very magazine is testament to, far from being exterminated, the Spectrum's story has continued and since the early 2000's, a burgeoning scene of enthusiastic Spectrum programmers, artisits and musicians have emerged to keep the machine supplied with a steady stream of exciting new releases.

In the years since '93, these small teams of developers (with many being a team of just one) have developed games which would have blown minds back in the day, pushing the Z80 to places thought impossible by gamers and developers alike during the machines heyday.

On these pages, we have chosen six games which were released in the last ten years, which broadly represent the current state of the independent Spectrum scene from all regions of the ZX globe.

Rewind Team: 2015
CRASH 2018 Annual 95% - bit.ly/3Xf2hf6

ZOSYA Entertainment: 2023
CRASH 16 93% - bit.ly/3xjYdzr



Amaweks: 2023
CRASH 15 92% - bit.ly/45ilflZ

Oleg Origin & Stella Aragonskaya: 2012
CRASH 2019 Annual 97% - bit.ly/3xjYjXP

Denis Grachev, Oleg Nikitin, Ivan Seleznev, Damien Guard: 2022
CRASH 13 93% - bit.ly/3KBFT88

Lee Stevenson, Pedro Pimenta, Andy Green & Richard Hollins: 2023
CRASH 17 82% - bit.ly/3VjGtwf

Gordon King's

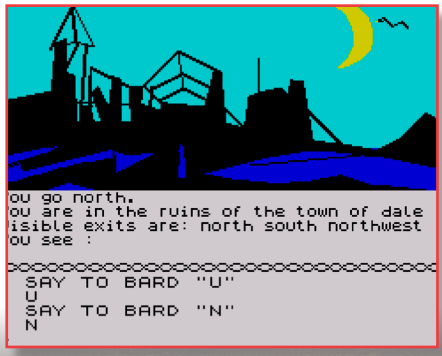
Adventure Trail

the hobbit

Melbourne House

Philip Mitchell & Veronika Megler | **£14.95** • **1982** • **48K**

Way before *Peter Jackson* brought *Tolkien's* works into popular culture, we kids from the '70s and '80s were subjected to an unfinished cartoon movie by *Ralph Bakshi*. Intended to be split into two parts, those who never read the books were left with a cliffhanger about the fate of *The Ring* and its bearers. Sadly, the financiers prevented the second movie from happening. With the name *Baggins* firmly in the minds of many computer game fans, when the Hobbit text adventure was released in 1982, it seemed like the perfect time to reacquaint ourselves with *Middle Earth* and the origins of *The One Ring*. The game was accompanied by the paperback edition of the book, which encouraged gamers to read as it assisted in this quest. You started the game in *Bag End*, where you assumed the role of the unsuspecting thief that is *Bilbo Baggins*. We were quickly introduced to *Gandalf* and the singular dwarven troupe member (and leader) *Thorin,* who invited you on a quest to steal the gold from *Smaug* the dragon. This served as an introduction to using the text parser without getting killed by imminent danger. Once you left *Hobbiton*, you had multiple routes to decide upon. The adventure featured all the critical locations of the book, and many of them, although concisely described, painted vivid images in our minds. *Middle Earth* had truly come to the Spectrum.

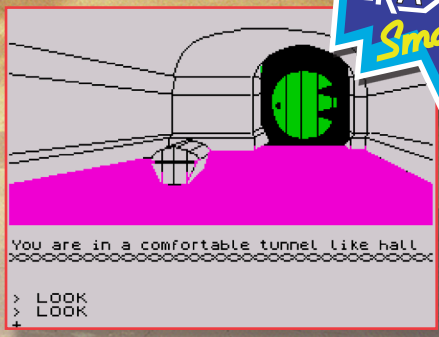


Criticism

I cannot understate this text adventure's impact on me. Even playing it today, I still get great pleasure and escapism from it. Would I be writing for CRASH if the game had not seeded my love for reading and encouraged me to step into the world that the accompanying book offered? Probably not. What stands out in this game, even to this day, are the dynamic elements. Gandalf and Thorin are the two main characters you interact with, and they come and go as they please; with just some thoughtful programming like this, the adventure feels so organic. The day and night cycles mark the passing of time (and the petrifying of trolls) -

"The Hobbit" was the first game to feature an advanced text parser system, allowing players to input complex commands. This innovation enabled dynamic character interactions and evolving storylines, setting a new standard for interactive fiction in the early 1980s.

this gives a sense of the urgency to get to Erebor. The characters' moods also seem to change - check out Gollum after you start wearing the ring - he actively tries to throttle you! All these things atop Tolkien's lore give the player a game bigger than the sum of its parts. Yes, the limited *Inlgish* (as the instructions called it) takes a bit of getting used to for the modern gamer, and there's a lot of trial and error involved in getting NPCs to do things, or in performing tasks yourself. But once you've mastered it, you know exactly what you can and cannot do in the game, and you can happily play within these constraints. In saying that, this game's language is way more sophisticated than that of its peers from the same period. Visually, the way the game draws the sparse art for the locations can be rather tedious, but this was 1982, and for years, those images shaped how I imagined the scenes when I read the book. *The Hobbit* was ahead of its time and remains unsurpassed as a text adventure. To this day, we still quote, "*Thorin* sits down and starts singing about gold".



Difficulty:
It can be challenging because if critical NPCs die or you miss certain inventory items, there's no way to backpedal. While this is a shortcoming of the game, it was acceptable at the time.

Graphics:
Slow to draw, but memorable locations break up the monotony of bear text.

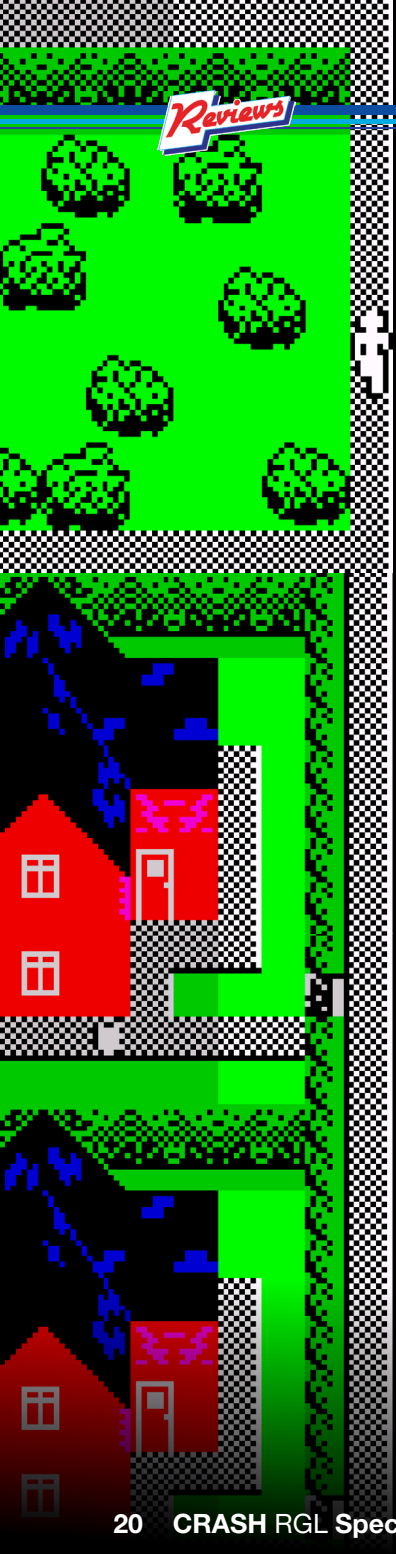
Presentation:
With the book that came with it and the way the game is introduced to the player, this is a full and polished adventure.

Input Facility:
Although the parser is limited, it is ahead of its time compared to other adventure games. The ability to use verbs and prepositions seldom results in the frustrating 'I don't understand' response.

General Rating:
One of the earliest and still one of the greatest text adventures to grace the ZX Spectrum.

atmosphere:	93%
interaction:	93%
lasting interest:	91%
value for money:	90%

Overall: 93%



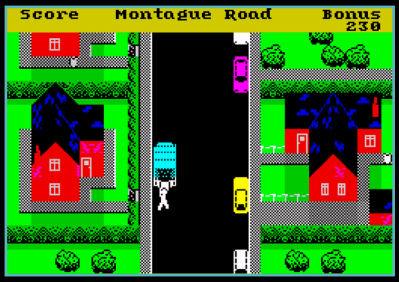
Reviews

Trashman

New Generation Software

Malcolm E. Evans | £5.95 • 1984 • 48K

Ah, Montague Road and its surrounding neighbourhood, in a time when people cared about their gardens. What a great area to be the local scaffie. But it was tough work back in the 80s - forget those modern-day wheelie bins; these hardy blokes physically carried our bins. So, it's here we find ourselves in this mundane job simulator. Viewed from a top-down perspective, *Trashman* must collect a set amount of bins on each day of the week. Hedges and fences surround the properties, so he can only enter via the gates. Remember to stick to the garden path, as walking on the homeowner's precious lawns will rapidly decrease the bonus timer. Once the bin is picked up, Trashman moves a little slower as he makes his way back to the lorry, but once the trash is dumped in the vehicle's rear, he's lighter on his feet again. On successfully returning the bin to its original spot, the owner will open the door to offer what I can only say is a thinly veiled salacious request under the ruse of requiring some DIY assistance. This, ladies and gents,



Paul's Take

Nah-nah nah-nah nah-nah nah-nah - Trashman! Okay, it may not have the same ring to it, but the humble refuse collector still has their place in society as much as Batman does. Batman may well fight some of the most dangerous criminals around, but can he pick up three black bags at once whilst dredging through the cold rain? I thought not. As mundane as collecting rubbish may sound, it still provides a challenge as you make your way up each road, and the added humour adds to its appeal further. You can't say it's not original either - did you ever play anything like this before? No. It's a true original, and one that we can say with hand on heart is a true 'Speccy' game.

is when the game becomes *Confessions of a Trashman*. On exit (wiping the sweat off his brow and earning some much-deserved bonus points), it's off to the next house. Remember that the bin lorry doesn't wait at each stop for long and keeps moving up the road. The street is fraught with danger, primarily speeding cars, pavement cyclists and feral dogs. The vehicles are deadly to our dustman (including walking in front of the bin lorry), and the bike and mutt injuries cause *Trashman* to limp. Only when all the bins have been emptied and returned can Trashman get a cup of tea and go to the next street the following day.

Criticism

Exploding with colour and charming design, *Trashman* is undeniably one of the pioneering games that made the Spectrum what it is. I love the whole *British* '80s zeitgeist captured in the game, and it makes you reflect on our memories of our streets and their workers when we were kids. It is a slow-paced game, and I know it won't be for everyone, but I think this is a very important ZX Spectrum title. Firstly, it's highly original - yes, it slightly borrows a *Frogger* element, but I can't recall playing anything like this ever since. Secondly, the graphic design showed off the *Spectrum's* colour palette, with next to no colour clash. It looks gorgeous and is quintessentially Sinclair. I love the humour in the game, where the homeowners will ask you a question, and after you pop in (wink wink), you leave with a witty remark. This is a timeless classic that helped immortalise the *Spectrum*.

- Gordon King

Comments

Crash of old only awarded this 83%. It deserved better, as it paved the way for original games rather than simple arcade clones. It still looks gorgeous, and yes, the sound is sparse, and it may be a bit repetitive, but it has yet to lose any of its charm.

Keyboard: Cursor Keys
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair & Cursor

Use of Computer:	**88%**
Graphics:	**80%**
Playability:	**90%**
Getting started:	**90%**
Addictive Qualities:	**89%**
Overall:	**90%**

SPECTRUM MEMORIES

Stuart Chiplin

HEAD OF COMMERCIAL EVALUATIONS AT PLAION

My primary school headmaster first introduced me to computing by summoning me to his office. I wasn't the best-behaved student, so I approached with some trepidation. However, all he wanted to do was show off his new pride and joy, a ZX81. I was immediately hooked and begged my parents for one that Christmas, and thankfully, they obliged.

A couple of years later, I was at one of my mother's friend's houses, where her sons were playing a game in the lounge. I hated wearing my glasses in public due to my severe short-sightedness, so when it was my turn, I was terrible at the game. The bigger boys constantly yelled at me to "jump", and of course, I failed miserably. It was *Manic Miner* on the Spectrum, a significant upgrade from the ZX81 games I had been playing. I had to beg my parents again, and luckily a kid in my tutor group was selling his Spectrum. I managed to get it, rushed home, and plugged it into the TV. I only had a couple of games, including Quicksilva's *Aquaplane*, but soon bought *Manic Miner*. The rest is history, and I remain an avid player of both modern and retro games to this day.

Paul Gouge

GAMES INDUSTRY ENTREPRENEUR AND CO-FOUNDER OF PLAYDEMIC

In 1984, I was 7 and my brother 5, both at the perfect age to appreciate the wonder of Christmas. Our sibling rivalry often escalated to violence, but this year, we were united in our burning desire for one thing: a Sinclair Spectrum. Believing in the magic of Christmas, we put our efforts together and it was a huge relief when we ventured downstairs and saw a present of the correct size and shape under the tree! As we raced to unwrap the present, the reality that it was a shared gift hit us.

The initial fight over unwrapping was quickly subdued by threats from our father to unplug the TV. Once set up, we watched the dancing lines indicating a successful load of *Scuba Dive*.

Pinning my brother to the ground won me the first go, but I made the error of turning away and whilst I was grappling with the rubber keys on another descent to retrieve Pearls from the bottom of Durell's treacherous ocean, my brother broke off two small pieces of polystyrene from the packaging and rammed them into my ears - rendering me deaf!

One trip to A&E later, and with my hearing restored, we returned home.

Whilst my father had been preparing Christmas lunch, my smug brother had spent an enjoyable morning on the Spectrum. It was clear video games were going to have a major impact on my life.

Paul Andrews

RGL'S CO-CEO & CEO OF HEARD

I have so many Spectrum memories it is so hard to pick only one from playing games with my friends at their houses or mine, to going to ZX Micro Fairs at Alexandra Palace and coming back clutching my spoils of the day, including discounted games on cassette. I paid for my very first Spectrum by saving up week after week doing multiple paper rounds whatever the weather. I also bought the ZX Printer, joysticks, interfaces 1 and 2 and the Microdrive. All these things led me to be inspired by the opportunities Sir Clive created almost by accident, spawning a generation of coders and businesspeople. It eventually led me to collect tech and artefacts created by Clive and to personally have one of the best collections in the world of his work, including rare design artwork, a lot of original cover art from related games of the day, and *Alien* - the world's fastest C5. Eventually, it also led me to meet and be a business partner of Sir Clive, and in a roundabout way, it inspired me, and all the other things I've created or originated, as well as the people I've employed across the globe, and the opportunities for others I have myself created, so, thank you, Clive.

Darren Melbourne

RGL'S CO-CEO & DIRECTOR OF LICENSING AT ANTSTREAM

My love of the Spectrum became the foundation that my entire career would be built around. My earliest gaming memories were of my friends and I gathering around the TV to play the latest games. The Spectrum was without limitation or equal: thousands of colours, orchestral music and sound effects, and arcade-perfect conversions... well, that's how it felt, anyway. Our imaginations filled in the limitations of the hardware, providing us with hours of entertainment in an entirely new way.

The first time I played *Manic Miner* was a moment that I will remember forever. It was in the North Kent Computer Centre in Welling. As I trudged up the dank stairwell to join my friends in the shop, I became aware of a soundtrack I had never heard before. Matthew Smith's homage to Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' was issuing from a small colour TV.

I walked over to see what the game was and saw *Manic Miner* for the first time. My best friend and gaming rival David Mayell was playing, deftly controlling Miner Willy around level one and dying on the comparatively easy Level two. I was itching to play; I instinctively knew that I would be better. A challenge was made, and a Cadbury's Crème Egg was on the line.

After an hour of back-and-forth play, David was crestfallen and defeated, the Crème Egg was mine, and the sobriquet 'Master of Eugene's Lair' was bestowed upon me.

Penetrator

Beam Software/Melbourne House

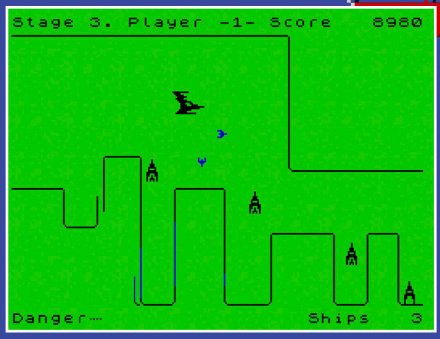
Philip Mitchell & Veronika Megler | £6.95 • 1982 • 48K

Okay, okay, stop that sniggering! Yes, we all know it can be used as a rude word, but it's not in this case, alright? And there'll be no more immature nonsense from now on, okay? Right, let's get on with the game.

Penetrator (hee hee) sees you taking control of a bomber jet as you speed across rocky mountain terrain, taking out satellites and rockets, all while trying your best not to crash into said rocky terrain. If you think it looks rather familiar, then you'd be right as it's a clone of the arcade game Scramble, and author Philip Mitchell - who was responsible for some other classic Speccy games, most notably *The Hobbit* and the impressive visuals-led game *Mugsy* - was aiming to create a game with the same appeal, look and playability of the original.

Criticism

Fireworks greet you on the title page before the name of the game is scrawled across the screen, and then it's an assault on your eardrums as sirens go off to alert you. Alert you to what, I'm not sure, but it certainly alerted me to

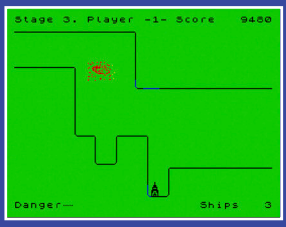


hit the start button as soon as I could. So, onto the game, and after a little ditty that plays like a horn leading an army into battle, you're off and away, and it's time to get as high as you can before you go crashing into the unforgiving terrain.

As you fly across, satellites spin and rockets fly towards your general direction, and this is where your bombs come in handy - dropping them strategically is the aim of the game here as only two can be dropped at any one time, and as rockets start

Gordon's Take

What a superb adaptation of *Scramble*, made for the humble ZX home micro. It's got the looks, impressively fast scrolling, and sound effects that burst from your beeper chip on the 48K. Those with a penchant and huge nostalgia for the early period of the Spectrum must surely have pangs for this game. Nothing was better than running home from school, firing this up, and avoiding the caverns while shooting the radar dishes. When you got fed up with that, you were able to design your own levels in the editor. Infinite possibilities. *Penetrator* offers a double layer of old-school - by its own nature and because it was made during the pioneering period of the Spectrum.



coming thick and fast, you'll soon learn that timing is everything. Of course, you do have lasers to help shoot the rockets should they evade your bombs, but as the screen moves across rather quickly, things get a little tight, meaning you have to manage navigation on top of taking out the rockets. Not doing you any favours is that to shoot your lasers you have to tap the 'thrust' button, which can lead to you moving a little closer to the things you're trying to avoid.

The game does run rather smoothly, though, and when the screen gets busy, things get frantic and exciting as you will doubtless see your ship explode multiple times, either from getting blown up by a rocket or flying face-first into a mountain. The other excellent thing to add about the game is the level design that is incorporated, allowing you to create your own levels to crash around in. Nice!

- Paul Davies

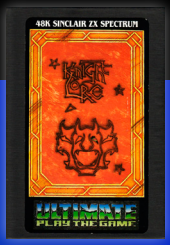
Comments

While Penetrator may look a little basic by today's standards, it still holds its own when it comes to a 'pick up and play' arcade shooter, should you fancy a quick blast at something where you have to destroy everything. The level designer helps it stand out amongst its peers and is a welcome addition.

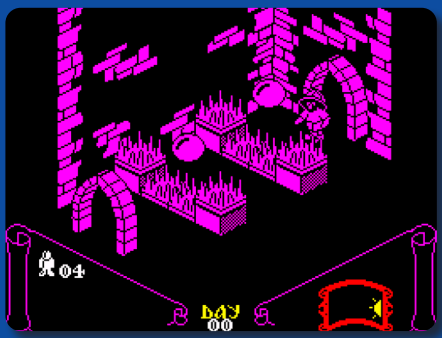
Keyboard: Q,A,O,P, SPACE
Joystick: n/a

Use of Computer:	**80%**
Graphics:	**80%**
Playability:	**83%**
Getting started:	**83%**
Addictive Qualities:	**83%**
Overall:	**83%**

THE LEGACY OF KNIGHT LORE



Ultimate Play The Game's *Knight Lore* revolutionised the Spectrum gaming scene forever upon its release in 1984. Join Graeme Mason as he celebrates the impact of the isometric wonder and looks at some of the included games on The Spectrum, which it inspired.



While judging a game on its reception in the press can be a hazardous exercise, the overwhelmingly positive response to Ultimate's 1984 epic tells its own story: Game Of Month in Personal Computer Games with a 10/10 score; 9/10 in Sinclair User; 99% (!) in Sinclair Programs; 9/10 in Computer & Video Games, with a perfect ten score for graphics; and, of course, a Crash Smash in the Christmas 1984 issue, scoring a massive 94%. There could be no doubt that *Knight Lore*, Ultimate's latest game, held back while it completed its roster of 2D efforts, would completely change Spectrum gaming.

While the isometric style was far from original – Sandy White's *Ant Attack* introduced the technique almost a year earlier – *Knight Lore's* superb animation, sleek graphics, and tight gameplay refine the genre, its clever background routines working overtime to ensure the whole experience is as smooth as possible. Each screen is a puzzle, solved by lateral thought and careful manipulation of the protagonist, the poor cursed *Sabreman*, transformed into a menacing werewulf each night. *Sabreman* has 40 days and 40 nights to locate the ingredients to a magic potion that will cure him of his lycanthropy. Sadly, the mad wizard owner of the *Knight Lore* castle has infested his domain with numerous hostile creatures and guards, making this the ultimate [groan – Ed] challenge for any Spectrum gamer.

Knight Lore didn't just impress critics and Spectrum owners. Such was the technical prowess on show, sprites effortlessly and smoothly moving behind each other, that Ultimate's game inspired rival Spectrum programmers to crack the method used by the Stamper brothers and devise their own 3D isometric games. The result was a startling new genre as fans were treated to a range of fresh games, each with a twist on the famous original, not least, of course, from Ultimate itself.

The Spectrum comes with several marvellous isometric wonders from these programmers. Let's have a look at the best of them.

Fairlight
a prelude

Released in the Summer of 1985, Bo Jangeborg's *Fairlight* brings a medieval twist to the party while adding several fresh elements to the gameplay. Its protagonist, the reluctant hero Isvar, can pick up objects and fight enemies, adding multiple solutions to the various problems he encounters.

Fairlight's real-world style locations also add a degree of realism to its play once you've got the hang of the extensive array of keyboard commands.

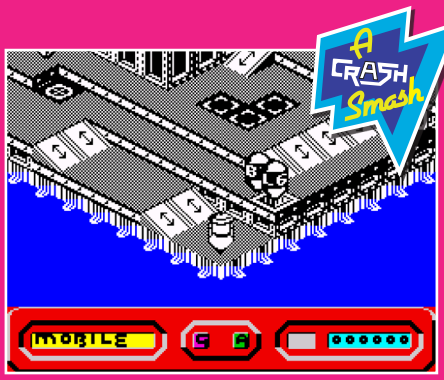
HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Combat, collectable objects, real-world locations.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"A stunning game, achieved with a new programming technique."

QUAZATRON

Graftgold's Steve Turner was another programmer impressed by Ultimate's 3D isometric games. Subsequently, the Essex coder took these techniques and wedded them to Andrew Braybrook's smash C64 game, *Paradroid*, creating a spiritually similar but graphically diverse Spectrum alternative. In *Quazatron*, you're in charge of KLP-2, a lonesome droid with the daunting task of deactivating all the rogue droids on the eponymous world. KLP-2 can either destroy its enemies or 'grapple' them, which activates a frenetic mini-game.

Success means the player can harvest the defeated droids' best parts. Failure means destruction.

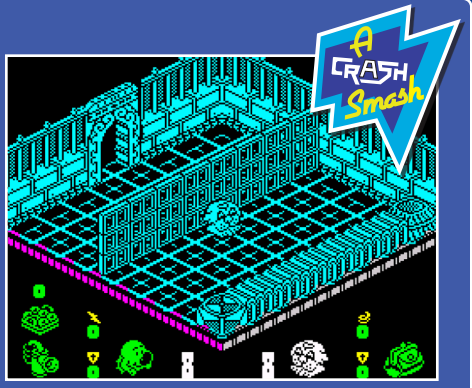


HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Unique grappling mini-game; large, scrolling areas.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"This is definitely one game that will keep you at your Spectrum for months."

Having refined his skills with the 1986 licence, *Batman*, Jon Ritman (and Bernie Drummond) returned a year later with what many Spectrum fans regard as the finest isometric game on the Sinclair computer.

Head Over Heels' esoteric world contains another set of mind-boggling physics puzzles, some of which are solved separately by one of the two characters (who each have particular skills), while other situations can only be overcome once the pair are reunited. A true classic of the Spectrum.



HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Two characters, each with separate abilities, more when combined.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"The best fun you're likely to have with a Spectrum for quite some time."

Head Over Heels has recently been updated for the ZX Spectrum Next, allowing new and old fans to enjoy its charms.

Croatian programmer Dusko Dimitrijevic had already scored a medium-sized hit with his one-on-one combat game, *Kung-Fu*, before cementing his place in Spectrum folklore with this hard-boiled gumshoe game in 1986. The player is Jack Marlow, a private detective with a dangerous assignment: infiltrate the offices of a mob boss and retrieve an incriminating tape recording.

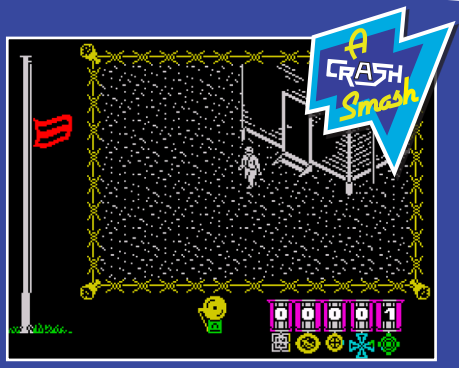
The task won't be easy: mobsters, some armed, stand in Marlow's way. Fortunately, a dame is willing to help – but take care it's not her evil twin sister!

HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Vocal interaction (via speech bubbles), ranged combat, original scenario.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"A neat development on the 3D theme with a very different scenario."

The Great Escape

Presented in a stark and oppressive black and white, Ocean's *The Great Escape* arrived in the winter of 1986 to the delight of the Crash magazine reviewers. Created by the talented bunch at Denton Designs, the aim of the game is, as the title suggests, to escape. This can be done through various means but preferably by avoiding the guards, as capture results in a morale-sapping stint in solitary confinement. Hugely atmospheric, *The Great Escape's* grim camp is a pleasure to explore – just watch out for the searchlight!



HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Open-world format; World War 2 scenario; multiple solutions.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"Presentation is of the highest quality, the graphics are superb, and the game is very playable."

Where Time Stood Still

Denton Designs were back 18 months later with another extravagant isometric adventure, this time for the 128K Spectrum. Inspired by classic adventure stories such as *The Lost Horizon* and *The Land That Time Forgot*, *Where Time Stood Still* begins at the site of a plane crash as the survivors contemplate the gravity of their situation. The player controls the pilot, Jarret, helping the quartet negotiate the hostile land, battling rickety bridges, hungry natives, dinosaurs, and more.

HOW IT ADVANCED THE GENRE:
Multiple playable characters; icon control; character management; large scrolling landscape; dinosaurs.

WHAT CRASH SAID:
"A thoroughly engrossing arcade adventure."

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